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## THE SELECTION OF MATERIAL.

WHAT is most to be desired to-day is not more theory or more startling examples of radical practice, but rather that the rank and file of teachers throughout the country may grasp the commonplaces of educational thought and may live up to them. There is more conservatism abroad than is usually acknowledged. In town and city the life of the school is only partially redeemed from the mechanical methods of former days. The physical well-being of the child is not yet made of first importance. Fresh air, cheerful variety, rhythmic games, happy play, corrective gymnastics are too occasional and perfunctory. Motor training has barely scratched the surface of the teaching consciousness of America. Music as a highly nutritive element in child nurture is yet unrecognized even by directors of this branch. Too much time is given to the drill upon the forms and symbols of music, while the rich opportunities for the culture of the musical sense are neglected. Similar statements might be made about other portions of the curriculum.

Is there a remedy for these palpable defects? No doubt many remedies could be suggested, and I purpose to speak here at some length of one. It is that all along the line officials and directors of education pay more attention to the principles involved in the selection of material for teaching. Everybody believes that character is the end of education, and that a healthy body is of first account. It is known also that body, mind, and spirit are one, and that interest and feeling are the most potent allies of the will. Why, then, should there not be a more complete emancipation of the teacher from the old formal curriculum, and a larger range of choice, so that in the daily process of adapting means to end the teacher may be conscious of personal growth and may take professional pride in doing what is best for the child?

A moment's reflection will show that the living, growing teacher is the real dynamic power in every school. Nearly

every educational address in its peroration exalts the teacher and minimizes the importance of the curriculum and other school appliances. And yet I fear that the same educators who speak with such eloquence upon this subject return to their fields of labor where quantitation standards are enforced, and indulge themselves in a sort of comfortable feeling that the time has not yet arrived to seek these ideals in their particular field. They are content with a kind of excellent uniformity which subordinates the interests of the child to the school and its highly developed curriculum. Why not begin to live up to our knowledge and belief? The aphorism, "We learn by doing," is as good for the teacher as for the pupil. If men and women are once enthused with the great spiritual aims of teaching and training, they will experience a new love for their pupils and a new zeal for their work. If a part of the responsibility of selecting the activities of the school is placed upon them, there will be enterprise, invention, research, discovery, and conquest. Some will go far beyond others in their enthusiastic and courageous experimentation. There will be seen more and more of the scientific skill that has entered the fields of horticulture and stock-raising. The scientist, the artist, or the musician of today could do little of value were he obliged to wear shackles of any kind. Every creative work requires freedom both in design and execution. Shall the teacher be classed with the artist, the poet, and the architect, or with the policeman, the bookkeeper, or the seamstress? There is a crying need for largeness in the point of view of school superintendents and supervisors. The reform needed must begin at the top and work downward.

1. Personality emancipated and upheld by lofty ideals should be first, while the curriculum should be made second in importance. Excellence in teaching art is subjective rather than objective. Those teachers who have served time in subservient obedience to the requirements of a detailed curriculum are often confirmed invalids. They are like the poor creatures in *Barnaby Rudge*, who, being rescued by the mob from Newgate Prison, could not endure the freedom and confusion of the

street, and went back to their dungeons and their chains. What they need is not more restraint, but more careful, intellectual, and moral nursing during convalescence and until they are able to stand alone and act for themselves.

What is the meaning and value of all our pedagogical training in our normal schools and colleges, if it is not to develop ability and judgment in the selection and use of material? Even the skilled handicraftsman is permitted to select his own tools. Are we training teachers simply to follow and not rather to lead?

2. Superintendents and heads of departments may outline fields for investigation and study in such a way as to leave much room for choice and skilful planning by individual teachers. Whether it be geography, history, mathematics, physics, manual training, or the more general study of English, let the boundary lines of the subject be indicated and such suggestions made as will show the high premium that is to be awarded to originality and freshness of treatment. Let it be clearly seen that the thing asked for is not a text-book requirement or an examination standard. Let the curriculum be an earnest appeal to teachers and pupils to search for living realities. Whether the age of Pericles, of Charlemagne, of Queen Elizabeth, or of Washington be studied, present-day standards are to be used, and the comparative method is to be encouraged. The teacher, being free, is to lead her class into such an enthusiastic and intensive study as to make the current canons touching concentration and correlation seem of little account.

I have before me an octavo, one and one-half inches thick, containing a course of study for the schools of one of our largest cities. It is scholarly and elaborate. Every subject is worked out to the smallest detail. Few could have done the work better, but to the teachers of that city it is all second-hand material. It is placed in their hands as a product of superior knowledge and skill, and to follow it quite implicitly appears to be enjoined, not only by duty and conscience, but by the dictates of self-preservation. Here, then, we see school officials who ought to regard the spontaneous unfolding of the teacher's power as the

finest flower of a school system, taking away the opportunity of self-activity and freedom. A child cannot grow either in moral or intellectual power under these conditions, much less the teacher.

School administration in America should discover a higher function than the organizing and revising of the curriculum in such a way that teachers have only to follow the schedule. "The letter killeth, but the spirit maketh alive." How these Scripture words recall Colonel Parker and the gospel for which he stood! Surely the good work he began will not cease until there is freedom for every teacher in respect, not only of means, but also of methods.

3. With a broad and highly flexible curriculum an appeal may justly be made to the teacher for highly vitalized and studious effort. Diffident and doubtful at first, like a child learning to walk, he will soon rejoice in his strength. His brain will begin to teem with new possibilities and new devices. Instead of watching the clock for the time of dismissal, he is actually sorry to go home at night. By a sort of spiritual contagion his pupils are affected, as well as other teachers in the school. Under these conditions there is seen the newest of the new education.

Hitherto I have spoken chiefly of the obligation of the school official, and have tried to show that a teacher cannot do his best work unless he is free. Assuming that this is the case, something remains to be said about the particular part to be taken by the teacher in selection.

1. The amount and variety of subject-matter, like the amount and variety of food, are determined largely by appetite. I have an old friend who used to boast that he usually finished his meal with about the same appetite with which he began. The doctrine of interest influences every recitation in somewhat the same way. Selection is made with the child ever in the mind's eye. Where a class is involved the same rule holds good, but the skill required is greater. Select for interest at all hazards. This is not for entertainment, but for hard work that gives joy in the doing and leads to further achievement. This last sentence is

for the solace of the anti-imperialists in education who cannot bear to have the child happy in school and who long for the good old times when the school fostered *ennui*, humility, and wretchedness.

The fact that every human being accomplishes more and grows faster under the stimulus of interest is sure to affect teaching more and more as time goes on. The teacher will apply this truth in many ways. The culture-epoch theory comes to have a practical bearing. The beginnings of history will be found in the social life of early men, their aims and occupations. The teacher free to choose will discover nascent periods of growth and will adapt material accordingly. Myths, animal stories, tales of chivalry, pioneer stories, and other types of literature will each be fitted into its proper niche, for pupils will help in the selection, and their judgment is final. Nothing of this sort can happen where the curriculum is inflexible and where it is constructed upon strictly logical and subject-matter lines.

2. Under a freer selection the teacher may satisfy more fully the claims of motor ability. Here, too, in our most advanced schools there is a fatal restriction. A set of models in paper, wood, or iron looks well and is good as a foundation; but both special and class-room teachers must be encouraged to find opportunities for handwork that far transcend a limited and formal field. In field, forest, garden, shop, and schoolroom there are great possibilities. Whether in order to know social life by experience, or for the psychological ends of co-ordinating hand and brain, it makes little difference. The teacher of nature study, geography, or history who does not find many things to be done is not up to date.

3. I suspect that selection by the teacher would more often recognize the value of "rotation of crops." Suppose a class were permitted to drop any study for half a year for the sake of avoiding weariness and in order to attack some other subject more strenuously, I am sure the experiment would be fruitful. Says Guyau in his excellent book on *Education and Heredity*: "The temptation most difficult to resist in our modern society is that of completely exploiting our talents, of extricating from

them every particle of profit, and of bartering them for the maximum money and honor they can give. It is this unlimited exploiting of superiorities which renders them perilous." Fewer rows with fewer plants in a row bring the farmer his best crops. Add to that *rotation*, and we have a working formula for the selection and use of subject-matter.

4. All selection is to be made thoughtfully, keeping in mind the conditions involved. Central and typical truths and experiences are always best. Being rich and comprehensive in their relations, they preclude the necessity of an overcrowded curriculum. A lesson, like a sermon, is more valuable for its suggestiveness than for what it enforces *pro forma*. Teachers under proper encouragement will, in a given field, select what is practical and what relates itself to current life. The newspaper becomes a powerful aid. Books, papers, magazines, lantern slides, are useful means.

Space will not permit a fuller statement. I have tried to suggest a needed reform: To accomplish that reform, first, school officials should hesitate to "rush in where angels fear to tread," and, secondly, the teacher needs to be emancipated and his function enlarged so that his work may bear the stamp of free creative genius.

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